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CROWN POINT

# HISTORY

*of the . . . . .*

## CROWN POINT INDIANA . . . . . POST OFFICE



*By*

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LAKE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY  
REFERENCE SERVICES



## HISTORY OF THE POST OFFICE, CROWN POINT, INDIANA

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IN commemoration of the early pioneers who settled in this community, and reclaimed the then wilderness for the civilization which we now enjoy, the centennial of the first white settler was celebrated in 1934, and the centennial of the formation of Lake County as a governmental unit was celebrated in 1937.

At these events gifted narrators portrayed the county's early history which prompted the writer to attempt to salvage as much of postal history as could be obtained. It is a regrettable fact that no chronological record has been kept of the post office at Crown Point, Indiana. Hands that could have written, and tongues that may have spoken, were stilled by death before these lines were written.

Little credit for originality is taken by the writer. Facts and dates relative to this history were gleaned mostly from post office records, from Ball's histories and from memories of the pioneers still living.

The purpose of this history is to preserve for future generations a summarized record of salient facts and authoritative figures, which in future years may be read with greater avidity than now. As we pass along life's highway, historical facts become more valuable. It is the writer's hope that each subsequent postmaster will continue this record by adding to it the important events of his administration.

Postal service of today is so common place that its value and importance is only realized when the service is interrupted. Few realize the effort expended and the hardships endured by the pioneers to bring this service to the stage of near perfection that now exists. Early history is replete with stories of adventure, romance and heroism in carrying mail. For this reason

a very brief resume of postal history is given here.

The first people to have anything like a postal system was the Chinese. Long before the Christian era they had courier service that could be called a postal system. The Bible often refers to letters being sent by messenger service. The first record of a postal service other than direct messenger, was established by the Persians shortly before the time of Christ. They established a regular system carried on by mounted couriers.

To the Egyptians is ascribed the discovery of the art of making paper. Previous to this discovery, all messages were written upon parchment. Emperor Ceasar Augustus of the Roman Empire established a postal system in Europe at about the time of Christ. It is well to note from history that the greatest progress in postal service was usually made at the time of war. Great progress was made in establishing communication between nations during the latter part of the eleventh century by the Crusaders.

As early as 1639 an attempt was made to establish communication among the American Colonies. In 1665 regular service was established between New York and Boston. Mail was carried once each month from these cities in sealed bags. As roads were not well established, communication was carried on to Virginia and further south by coast-wise shipping. The British Government attempted to inaugurate a postal system with little success. The cost was excessive which added to the discontent of the colonies. When the breach with England was widened by the formation of the First Continental Congress, Benjamin Franklin was appointed as the first Postmaster General. Paul Revere was the first post rider.

As civilization extended into the wilderness it was closely followed



by the post rider, and later by the stage coach. As early as 1805 mail was carried through Fort Wayne to Fort Dearborn, now Chicago. By 1826 regular monthly trips were made through Fort Dearborn to Green Bay, Wisconsin. In 1838 railroads were first used to carry mail between Washington and Philadelphia.

The most romantic period of postal service followed the settlement of the far west. In 1848 gold was discovered in California. This was an incentive for a large and rapid influx of settlers. Records are full of adventure and romance of the pony express and stage coach transportation. Volumes could be written upon this stage of postal history.

The period that concerns this office had its beginning soon after the first white settler located in this vicinity. In the autumn of 1834 Solon Robinson located upon the site what is now Crown Point, Indiana and to him is ascribed much credit for the early progress of this settlement. He, being richly endowed with foresight and integrity, was the real pioneer in the formation of various movements to extend civilization into this community.

One year after he had settled here he applied to President Andrew Jackson for the establishment of a post office, and on March 14, 1836 he received his appointment as postmaster of Lake Court House, as Crown Point was then known. For compensation he received the proceeds of his office. He was obliged to transport the mail at his own expense from the nearest post office which at that time was Michigan City. On March 14, 1837 a contract was made with James H. Woodworth to transport the mail from LaPorte, by Lake Court House, to Joliet, Illinois. This contract evidently was not in effect

very long for the records indicate that a John Bradley received the same contract later in that year for the annual salary of \$450.00. Lake Court House being the only post office between LaPorte and Joliet, Illinois, mail was relayed from this office to Monticello, Indiana. During the years of 1837 and 1838 H. S. Pelton had the contract to transport the mail to Monticello.

Postage stamps were not in use until 1847. Previous to this time the charge was written upon the letter and either prepaid or collected upon delivery. Usually the latter. The rates at that time were high. An Act of Congress of March 2, 1825 established the following rates: on a single letter composed of one sheet of paper, for a distance not exceeding 30 miles, 6 cents; over 30 miles and not exceeding 80 miles, 10 cents; this charge was graduated until it reached 25 cents for over 400 miles. Each sheet of paper was rated as a letter. Thus two sheets of paper required doubled the original price.

Solon Robinson's receipts for the fiscal year of 1837 were \$24.03. During his term as postmaster he also served as agricultural correspondent for a New York newspaper and was able to frank his letters for some time. This franking privilege later led into an argument with the postal authorities, for in one of his annals he states that he is relinquishing his office on account of too much Tylerism. He served under Presidents Jackson, Van Buren, Harrison and Tyler.

After serving successfully for more than seven years, Solon Robinson asked to be relieved of his duties as postmaster and on May 24, 1843 turned the office over to Dr. Henry D. Palmer who, like Robinson, was closely identified with the early progress of this county. Dr. Palmer was Lake County's first resident doctor. Be-



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sides his medical practice he carried on with extensive agricultural interests on the large farm now owned by his grandson, Henry Feiler. He also served as Judge from 1838 to 1851.

As the national administration changed in 1845, President James K. Polk gave the appointment to Captain Joseph P. Smith who was Lake County's second county clerk. He was an outstanding military man, leading a company during the Mexican War and later lost his life during one of the Indian insurrections in Kansas. It was during his administration as postmaster that the name of Lake Court House was changed to Crown Point.

On May 5, 1847 Hiram S. Pelton was appointed postmaster but only served until June 16 of that year. His term ending suddenly by his death. Up to the present time he was the only postmaster who died during the term of his office.

The succeeding postmaster was Alexander McDonald, who had the distinction of being the first attorney to settle in Crown Point. He served until February 26, 1849 when David Pettibone received the appointment.

Mr. Pettibone, like Robinson and Smith, was county clerk and conducted the post office in connection with his county office. As the national administration again changed he relinquished his office on July 17, 1849 to Major Allman.

Mr. Allman, being county recorder, conducted his two offices jointly and served until November 13, 1852. He was one of Lake County's pioneers, coming to this county in 1841. He was the founder of the abstract company which is now known as the Lake County Title Company. In 1850 the first steam railroad, the Michigan Central, crossed Lake County, which gave new growth to this section of the state. From then on mail was

transported daily to Crown Point from Lake Station, which is now East Gary. Charles Allman, a nephew of Major Allman, completed his unexpired term and served until August 30, 1853 when James H. Luther received the appointment from President Fillmore.

Mr. Luther conducted his office from the town's only hotel, the Mills House, later known as the Rockwell House. He had been prominent in public affairs and in 1861 he was elected to the office of county auditor.

On January 8, 1855 President Pierce appointed a merchant, Joseph Jackson, as postmaster, who conducted his office from his general store which he sold on March 17, 1857 and moved to Wapella, Iowa where he later served as mayor for two terms. His term of office as postmaster not having expired, his son-in-law, Zebulon P. Farley, filled that office from March 17, 1857 until May 14 the same year when President Buchanan gave the appointment to Henry Wells.

Mr. Wells probably held the distinction of holding more public offices and spending more years in public life than any other early pioneer. He arrived in this county one day after Solon Robinson pitched his tent on what is now our court house site. He was appointed as the first sheriff of this county and served as elected sheriff for several terms later. He was Swamp Land Commissioner for many years and county treasurer for two terms.

In 1858 the Fort Wayne branch of the Pennsylvania R. R. was built through Hobart and from then on the mail was transported from there to Crown Point.

On March 22, 1860, Joseph P. Smith was again appointed postmaster but only served one year in his second term. William G. McGlashon, the succeeding postmaster,



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took office on March 9, 1861, just five days after President Lincoln was inaugurated and thirty-two days before the fatal shot was fired at Fort Sumpter which started the great Civil War.

Lake County at this time had a population of less than ten thousand and it was estimated that at least one thousand men enlisted in the war. Great excitement raged and much anxiety prevailed, causing increased demands upon postal service.

The money order system was inaugurated during Mr. McGlashon's term. In 1865 the first steam railroad was built through Crown Point and the town received its first direct mail service by train.

Mr. McGlashon was a successful merchant and conducted the post office from his store.

The next postmaster, George Willey, was appointed by President Johnson on September 13, 1866 and held that office until March 17, 1869. He was a successful farmer living east of the town limits. It was during his term that the village of Crown Point was incorporated as a town.

Zebulon P. Farley, the succeeding postmaster, had previously completed the unexpired term of his father-in-law, Joseph Jackson. He received his appointment from President Grant. Mr. Farley was nearly blind and the detail work of the post office was done by his wife, and son F. E. Farley, who later became postmaster.

The first Civil War veteran to receive the appointment as postmaster at this office was Harvey J. Shoulters, who succeeded Mr. Farley on April 11, 1877, President Hays making the appointment. Mr. Shoulters had enlisted with a New York company and came to this county shortly after the war. He was prominent in civic affairs and had served as deputy county audi-

tor before he became postmaster.

Following Mr. Shoulters' retirement on February 12, 1884, President Arthur gave the appointment to another Civil War veteran, William T. Horine. Mr. Horine came to Crown Point from Lowell where he had been an instructor in the public schools. He conducted his office in the Allman building on the corner of Main and Clark streets. Being a disabled war veteran and having one leg amputated during the war, he was later awarded a position in the War Veterans' Pension Department in Washington, D. C.

The third Civil War veteran to receive the postmastership was Lieutenant John P. Merrill, who received his appointment from President Cleveland on February 24, 1888. Born at Merrillville on October 13, 1843, he was the first Lake County born citizen to hold this office. Mr. Merrill was one of the county's outstanding citizens, having been a successful merchant, trustee of Ross township and county treasurer before he became postmaster. He died suddenly February 21, 1897.

On January 6, 1892 the fourth and last Civil War veteran to serve as postmaster was John J. Wheeler. He received his appointment from President Harrison. Born on January 11, 1848, he was not of an age to join his father, Colonel John Wheeler, when he organized the 20th Indiana Regiment in 1861, but managed to enlist later in 1863 when only fifteen years old and served with the Union for the remainder of the war. Early in his career he was twice elected to the office of county surveyor and in 1872 he entered the newspaper business which he followed very successfully until his death. Serving as postmaster, he was ably assisted in his work by his son, Fred Y. Wheeler, who later served as



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postmaster for a long term of years.

During John J. Wheeler's term this country was still suffering from one of its major depressions. When the Pullman Car Works strike was taking place an attempt was made to stop all railway transportation including the mails. It was then that President Cleveland called out the Federal troops to protect the mail and once and for all established the rule that the mail must go on regardless of strikes.

As the National administration had again changed, Mr. Wheeler, after completing his four year term, relinquished the office on February 11, 1896 to Arthur A. Maynard who received his appointment from President Cleveland. Mr. Maynard had previously been a railway employee and had served as a staunch worker for the Democratic party.

After serving as postmaster for three years Mr. Maynard resigned and on April 18, 1899 Floyd E. Farley received his appointment from President McKinley. Mr. Farley, as a young man, had helped his father when he had been postmaster, which experience served him well when he assumed his postal duties. He had also had varied experience in public life by serving as deputy sheriff and deputy auditor for several county officials.

Mr. Farley's term lacked one month of lasting thirteen years and was probably the most epochal as far as postal progress was concerned, since Mr. McGlashon's term. It was during this term that the postal receipts reached the stage when the Crown Point office passed from the Third Class to the Second Class, and an assistant postmaster was appointed. The first assistant postmaster appointed was Miss Ella Massoth who is still serving in that capacity. Postal Savings and rural mail service were also in-

augurated during this term.

On February 20, 1912 Charles J. Daugherty assumed office, receiving his appointment from President Taft. Mr. Daugherty had been prominent in public service previous to this appointment. Coming from Hammond, Indiana, he first served as deputy sheriff and later served for two terms as sheriff of this county.

On July 1, 1914 city delivery service was granted to Crown Point with two carriers. John Fraas, one of the original carriers, is still in service after nearly twenty-five years of duty. It has been roughly estimated that in performance of his duty he has traveled on foot over one hundred thousand miles, or more than four times the distance around the world.

Mr. Daugherty relinquished his office on February 25, 1915 to Peter F. Hein who received his appointment from President Wilson.

During Mr. Hein's term increased duties were placed upon the postal system incident to the World War. Aliens were registered at the post office, war savings stamps were sold in addition to the many other demands from the public.

Mr. Hein resigned as postmaster on April 1, 1921 to take over the cashiership of the Commercial Bank, which position he is filling at the present time. He was elected and served two terms as state treasurer, from 1935 to 1939.

The succeeding postmaster, Fred Y. Wheeler, received his appointment from President Harding and had the distinction of serving under three succeeding Presidents, Coolidge, Hoover and Roosevelt.

Mr. Wheeler entered the post office possessing an unusual hereditary background. His great grandfather, Solon Robinson, was the first postmaster; his grandfather was Colonel John Wheeler, who lost his life at the battle of Gettys-



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burg, and his father was John J. Wheeler, who was a former postmaster and editor of the Lake County Star.

Mr. Wheeler had assisted his father when he was postmaster and was also his associate in the publishing business. His wide experience in dealing with the public and his former contact with postal requirements facilitated his efforts to render efficient service to the public. He lacked only two months in equaling Mr. Farley's time record of service. After the national administration had changed and his third term of commission had expired he relinquished his office on January 1, 1934 to the present postmaster, being in office twelve years and nine months.

Mr. Wheeler's term was marked by the post war period of prosperity which was reflected upon the postal receipts, and at one time this office was within striking distance of being a first class office. As the prosperity period reflected favorably upon the office receipts, so did the recession period reflect adversely, and up to the present time, while much progress has been made, postal revenue has not reached the height attained in 1929.

Up to this time the post office had been located in rented quarters. Preliminary work to obtain a government owned building for Crown Point was done by Mr. Wheeler. Through the efforts of our Congressman, William T. Schulte, a grant was made in July, 1934 for a Federal building to be used solely as a post office for this city and adjoining territory. In August of that year a site for the building was chosen at the corner of East Joliet and South East streets. The contract price of the building was \$34,590.00 which was submitted by the Moses Construction Co. of Chicago, Illinois. The actual work for construction was

started on February 25, 1935 and the building was occupied on October 1st of that year. It is a one-story structure, sixty by sixty-eight feet, of brick with sandstone trimming, upon a monolithic concrete foundation. Most of the material specified in the building is of a noncombustible nature which makes it most durable and nearly fire proof, and with its ample dimensions should serve this community for a long time.

Since the establishment of the post office here in 1836 to the present time many changes in the postal system have taken place. Many additional duties have been assumed by the post office. When Solon Robinson's receipts for a year were \$24.03 the only service rendered was the transportation of letters and newspapers.

During the past fiscal year the postal receipts at this office were over \$35,000.00. This includes only the sale of postage stamps, box rentals and second class receipts. Postal Savings accounts exceeding \$190,000.00 are held at this office. Money order receipts exceeded \$200,000.00 annually. The sale of documentary stamps amounts to \$4,000.00 annually. Since the inception of the sale of U. S. Savings bonds March 1, 1935 the sale of these bonds amounts to more than \$275,093.00 with an accrued value of over \$360,000.00.

With the establishment of new governmental agencies the quantity of frank mail has been greatly increased from which no credit or revenue is derived, but more requests are received for statistics and information to promote them, which broadens the scope of postal activities.

Although the activities are varied, and naturally the duties become irksome at times, this office, with its able staff, has found it a real pleasure to serve the public,



with the feeling that part of its compensation comes from the realization of accomplishment and the splendid cooperation received from the patrons.

A population of about 8,400 people, nearly equally divided in numbers by the city and rural sections, is served from this office.

The rural mail service comprises three routes covering 187 miles of travel. Edward Bixenman, who is the present carrier on route three, has been a rural carrier since August 16, 1905, and has the longest record for continuous service in this office. Max Mracek has served since March 1, 1907. Herbert M. Michael was transferred from Lowell on June 16, 1935.

City delivery service is also divided into three routes. John Fraas, the senior carrier, has carried the same route since July 1, 1914. Loran Holloway received his appointment on August 16, 1924, and Clarence Thomen received his May 16, 1931. Fred Halfman is the present substitute carrier and Robert Golden delivers the special delivery letters.

The messenger service for transporting the mail from the depots is done by Arthur Volk who has performed this duty, with some intermission, for thirty-two years. The custodial duties are taken care of by Fred Rosenthal.

Previous mention has been made of the assistant postmaster, Miss Ella Massoth having held that office since its inception, when Crown Point became a second class office. She started her postal duties on March 30, 1908, and holds a record

approached by very few women in postal service.

The chief clerk, Harry Weber, started as substitute carrier September 4, 1916. Later he was appointed regular clerk and is now assisting in the financial department. Harold Phillips, now at the head of the dispatching clerks, started service as regular clerk on April 1, 1924. Leonard Bolt first served as substitute clerk in Hammond, Indiana and was appointed regular substitute at this office on January 1, 1931. He has been regular clerk for the past three years. Charles V. McFadden, the last appointed regular clerk, received his appointment on November 1, 1938. He had served as auxiliary rural carrier and substitute clerk for several years previous to his regular appointment. George Everett is regular substitute clerk at the present time.

While this group of workers takes pride in its daily task, it realizes that it is but a small cog in that vast postal system, which is the world's largest business. In the United States there are 45,000 post offices, employing 400,000 people. Through the International Postal Union each of these offices has contact with every country in the world that has a postal system.

We of today are prone to take too much credit for our advanced state of civilization. The advancement of mankind, to a great extent, is based upon the preservation of records of those who have labored before us. With this in mind the writer dedicates this little narrative to the workers of this office who have served before him.



**THE POSTAL SERVICE**

Messenger of sympathy and love  
Servant of parted friends  
Consoler of the lonely  
Bond of the scattered family  
Enlarger of the common life.

Carrier of news and knowledge  
Instrument of trade and industry  
Promoter of mutual acquaintance  
Of peace and good will  
Among men and nations.

—Woodrow Wilson

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Inscription on the U. S. Post Office Building, Washington, D. C.



